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ABSTRACT

This module was developed to offer direction and knowledge of resource support to elementary school teacher educators. It offers suggested objectives and resources that will enable education students and beginning teachers to achieve competence in communication with parents and other adults. The module works from the assumption that preservice and beginning teachers will be most involved with parents who are involved in governance through advisory councils, school site committees, and service on selection or curriculum groups. Focus is on communication with the home, parent-teacher conferencing, and organization of events such as open house. Potential involvement with parent aides and/or volunteeers in the classroom, or for special events, such as field trips is also covered. It is assumed that more experienced teachers and administrators will be involved in governance activities with the community and that inservice education should give continuing attention to this area. Proposed goals and objectives in effective communication are listed along with the suggested program level (foundations, methods, and student teaching) at which they should be initiated. A bibliography of reading resources keyed to specific learning objectives is included. (JD)

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# A Resource Module to Develop Elementary Preservice Teacher Competency in Communicating with Parents and Other Adults

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## Introduction

The ability to communicate with parents and other adults is increasingly a standard adopted or proposed for education programs leading to certification of elementary teachers. Communication with the public figures largely in the standards for preservice teacher education proposed by the National Education Association in Excellence in Our Schools: Teacher Education (NEA, 1982).

Given the trend toward explicit recognition of the need for teacher competence in communicating with parents and other adults, programs that prepare teachers must adjust curriculum accordingly. The resource module that follows was developed to offer direction and knowledge of resource support to elementary teacher educators facing this responsibility.

The goals and objectives proposed in the module follow a model offered by James P. Comer in Citizen Action in Teacher Education (November, 1982). From his experiences with a school-based intervention program of the Yale Child Study Center, Comer observes three levels of parent involvement. At level one, one to five per cent of the parents in a school are involved in governance through advisory councils, school site committees, and service on selection or curriculum groups. At level two, ten to twenty-five per cent of parents are involved as classroom volunteers, tutors, or materials producers at home. Parents at this level are active supporters of the school through work on projects of the school. At level three, fifty to one hundred per cent of parents are involved in conferences with staff and attendance at school functions.

The module works from the assumption that preservice and beginning teachers will be most involved with parents at level one. Thus, modular focus is on communication with the home, parent-teacher conferencing, and organization of events such as open house. The potential involvement of preservice and beginning teachers with parents at level two includes working

with parent aides and/or volunteers in the classroom or for special events such as field trips. Potential for work at level three is recognized through observation. The assumption here is that more experienced teachers and administrators will be involved in governance activities with the community and that inservice education should give continuing attention to this area.

Goals and objectives proposed in the model are classified by the type of traditional elementary preservice coursework into which they might be infused. While some teacher educators may choose to institute separate courses devoted to human or community relations, this module assumes that such competencies will be spread among foundations (history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology of education), methods, and practicum or field-based coursework.

Finally, the module provides reference to resources useful in developing related learning experiences. At present, many of the available resources come from special education, counseling, and early childhood education literature, but this is a rapidly expanding area with new resources appearing each month.

# A Resource Module to Develop Elementary Preservice Teacher Competency in Communicating with Parents and Other Adults

Upon completion of the preservice program, the elementary teacher should be able to communicate effectively with parents on a day to day basis and in the situations that commonly arise in schools. Refinement of communication skills should continue for inservice teachers with the recognition that strong community-school relations require administrative leadership and support.

Upon completion of the preservice program, it is suggested that the student be able to:

| Proposed goals and objectives | Proposed * Program Level | Possible ** Learning Resources |
|---|---|---|
| I. articulate a rationale for school/community relations that takes into account the goals of public education. | F | 3, 11, 15 |
| A. explain the benefits of parent/teacher and school/community communication to each of the role groups involved. | F | 3, 9, 11, 15, 21 |
| B. enumerate possible obstacles to parent involvement in the schools and ways school people can be sensitive to each. | F | 1, 15, 20, 21, 23, 29 |
| C. demonstrate knowledge of legal safeguards to the student's right to a public education regardless of race, creed, national origin, economic status, sex, race or handicapping condition. | F | 3, 13 |
| II. communicate with parents through a variety of available channels. | | |
| A. compose sample letters to parents that explain class activities clearly, positively, and with emphasis on student learning. | M | 7 |

| Proposed goals and objectives | Proposed * Program Level | Possible ** Learning Resources |
|---|---|---|
| B. analyze study packets of papers carried home by school children for the probable impact of teacher feedback and format and develop a strategy for sharing work completed at school with parents for discussion with a cooperating teacher. | M | |
| C. clearly state the major curricular goals in each subject area at his/her teaching level. | M, P | |
| D. articulate school district policy pertaining to dress, transportation, lunchroom procedures, excuse for absence, parental visits to classrooms, celebration of holidays, due process, field trip permissions, and health and safety regulations in response to questions commonly raised by parents. | P | |
| E. explain classroom policy and rationale pertaining to tardiness, homework, birthday celebrations, library use, and use of items brought from home in response to questions commonly raised by parents. | P | |
| F. compare sample letters to parents explaining the general purpose of homework in a particular setting and showing how sample assignments achieve that purpose. | P | |
| G. conduct at least three telephone calls to parents or other community members to confirm an arrangement or report on student progress toward a specific goal. | P | 20 |
| H. explain how student grades are determined in each of the subjects or areas related. | M, P | 7 |

| Proposed goals and objectives | Proposed * Program Level | Possible ** Learning Resources |
|---|---|---|
| I. conduct simulated and real conferences with parents to report on student progress that display the following characteristics: | M, P | 5, 7, 10, 19, 21, 27, AV1, AV3 |
| 1. Data to be shared with parents is assembled prior to the conference. | | |
| 2. Teacher behavior fosters two-way communication. | | |
| 3. Statements about student strengths and weaknesses are objective and reinforced with data. | | |
| 4. The teacher makes realistic suggestions for follow-up at home and at school. | | 15, 25, AV4, AV5 |
| J. conduct simulated and real conferences with parents to help solve a problem faced by/with a student that displays the following characteristics: | M, P | 5, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 27, 31, AV2, AV3 |
| 1. Data to be shared with parents is assembled prior to the conference. | | |
| 2. Teacher behavior attempts to reduce parental anxiety. | | |
| 3. The teacher, through verbal feedback, gives evidence of having listened to parents without judging or labeling. | | |
| 4. The teacher summarizes a realistic plan of action for home and school cooperation. | | |
| K. keep student records in a way that insures their confidentiality. | P | |

| Proposed goals and objectives | Proposed * Program Level | Possible ** Learning Resources |
|---|---|---|
| L. communicate with parents pertinent research findings in at least one area of mutual concern such as the educational value to T.V. or video games, nutrition and learning, drug use by elementary students, reference materials for the home, microcomputer purchase, educational toys and records. | F, M | 20 |
| M. develop a classroom newsletter that explains the goals of a unit or series of learning activities and ways the program may be supported at home. | P | 2 |
| III. establishes programs that enable parents to participate in school activities. | | |
| A. assist in conducting an open house, orientation session, or program at the school to inform or entertain parents. | P | 14, 26 |
| B. list classroom activities that could be assumed by parent volunteers or aides in the classroom. | M | 4, 15, 24 |
| C. involve parents in a classroom activity (field trip, assisting with learning centers or seat work, sharing with the class, etc.) with explicit communication of expectations and acknowledgement of involvement. | P | 21, 24, 26 |
| D. devise a means of acknowledging parent support of student learning at home and at school. | M, P | |
| E. compare and contrast descriptions of several classroom aide or volunteer programs. | F, M | 4, 24 |

| Proposed goals and objectives | Proposed * Program Level | Possible ** Learning Resources |
|---|---|---|
| IV. demonstrate awareness of the role of citizens in school governance at support. | | |
| A. report on attendance at at least two of the following meetings: school board, parent advisory council, parent teacher organization, curriculum committee that includes parents. | F | 3, 6, 8, 15, 22, 26, 28, 30 |
| B. visit with at least two citizens from diverse backgrounds about their expectations for the public schools. | F | 3, 13, 22 |

* F - foundations level
M - methods level
P - practicum (student teaching) level

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